

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE FRANK A. LoBIONDO,  
CHAIRMAN  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME  
TRANSPORTATION HEARING ON THE REVIEW OF THE  
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ICEBREAKER REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 26, 2006**

**The Subcommittee is meeting this morning to review the National Academies report on the Coast Guard's polar icebreakers, as well as the needs of the United States for these vessels. The Coast Guard's polar icebreakers are vital to our country's national interests, and Congress must ensure that the capability that we had in the past will be available in the future.**

**The Coast Guard's involvement in the polar regions began in 1885, when the USS Bear was transferred from the Navy to the Treasury Department for use in the Alaskan Patrol by the U.S. Revenue Marine, an ancestor of the Coast Guard. The BEAR is regarded as the first Coast Guard icebreaking vessel. And like today's Coast Guard icebreakers, the BEAR embodied the concept of the multi-mission ship. It broke ice, rescued shipwrecked**

**mariners, enforced fisheries laws, carried mail, and made hydrographic surveys.**

**Today's Coast Guard icebreakers are just as important. The United States has citizens and property in the Arctic, and we must continue to be able to protect and support these interests. Further, the area's importance will only increase in the future, with progressively more economic activity. There will be more fishing fleets, cruise ships, and military operations in the area. Certainly, the United States government must have reliable icebreaking vessels that this area will need.**

**In the Antarctic, the United States must maintain its year-round presence, and the Coast Guard's polar icebreakers play a critical role. The United States must continue to operate on the continent to ensure Antarctica is preserved for peaceful purposes and to provide access to an area vital to our scientific community. The nation must resupply its interests in this area, and this requires**

**ships to bring large quantities of fuel and materials. The Coast Guard's icebreakers have made this possible.**

**The importance of these regions should not be underestimated. It is very concerning that two of the Coast Guard's three polar icebreakers have reached the end of their 30-year service life. I am particularly troubled by the National Academies' report which concluded that the polar icebreaking fleet has been underfunded for many years, undermining our ability to operate in the polar regions.**

**I recognize and appreciate the budget constraints the Service and the Department are currently faced with, but I believe it is important for them to develop a realistic plan to ensure this nation continues to have a polar icebreaking capability well in the future.**

**I thank the witnesses for coming this morning, and I look forward to their testimony.**